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ABSTRACT

Literature on parent-toddler affiliative behavior which reflects the dynamic and reciprocal nature of parent-toddler interaction is reviewed in this paper, including an ecosystems perspective. Affiliative behaviors for parents and toddlers are defined with respect to the verbal and physical behaviors of both parent and toddler. Also, research results assessing affiliative behaviors together with research findings on parental caregiving and parental play interactions are presented. Practical implications and applications based on the research findings for child care programming are presented. Particular focus is placed on how verbal and physical affiliative behaviors for toddlers and adults can be used to develop more securely attached relationships for children in preschool settings. In addition, the importance of male interaction in the care of infants and toddlers as well as the cooperative play style of fathers with their toddlers is emphasized. Research findings related to categories of parental affiliative interaction with categories of parental play activities are interrelated with the implications for child care programs. (Author/DST)

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Factors Influencing Parent-Toddler Affiliative Interaction: Implications for Child Care Programming

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Abstract

Literature on parent-toddler affiliative behavior which reflects the dynamic and reciprocal nature of parent-toddler interaction is reviewed in this paper, including an ecosystems perspective. Affiliative behaviors for parents and toddlers is defined with respect to the verbal and physical behaviors of both parent and toddler. Also research results assessing affiliative behaviors together with research findings on parental caregiving and parental play interactions are presented. Caregiving behaviors are considered as a measure of parent-child interaction. Caregiving categories of general care, feeding, rest and hygiene are reported for both mothers and fathers. Parental play categories of arousal, exploratory, intellectual and social play are discussed with respect to categories of play and gender of child. Research findings concerning the frequency of parent-toddler affiliative interaction together with the frequency and type of parent-toddler play interaction are reported.

Practical implications and applications based on the research findings for child care programming are presented. Particular focus is placed on how verbal and physical affiliative behaviors for toddlers and adults can be used to develop more securely attached relationships for children in preschool settings. Special focus in placed on the importance of male interaction in the care of infants and toddlers as well as the cooperative, close, involved play style of fathers with their toddlers. Research findings related to categories of parental affiliative interaction with categories of parental play activities are interrelated with the implications for child care programming.

The Reciprocal Nature of Parent-Toddler Interaction and Affiliative Behavior

Personality formation and emotional development are primary goals in the socialization of the young child (Lamb, 1977a; Sroufe, 1979; Smith & Smith, 1980). Research has assessed social-emotional development of infants and toddlers by studying such typical behaviors as attachment, wariness, affiliation, curiosity and exploration (Sroufe 1979). Research on attachment, wariness, affiliation and curiosity has substantiated the importance of these behaviors in personality formation for the child. In particular, affiliation and attachment behaviors have been the focus of considerable research and are viewed as major factors in the social growth and development of young children (Lamb, 1977a; 1977b; Vandell,1979; Lamb, 1977b; Stewart and Burgess, 1978; and Fox, 1977).

The literature recognizes parent-toddler affiliation and attachment as a reciprocal process, with the child receiving a great deal of affiliative and attachment behavior directed by parents toward their infant or toddler (Stewart & Burgess, 1978). Research studies of affiliation and attachment portray the dynamic, and reciprocal nature of the parent-toddler relationship with affiliative interaction reinforcing further prosocial affiliative behavior on the part of the child (Lamb, 1977c; Field, 1978; Belsky, 1979; Stewart & Burgess, 1978). Parental affiliative behavior toward infant and toddler serves as a model for the child's own behavior. Frequently parents initiate affiliative and attachment interaction so children receive much unsolicited affiliative behavior from his/her parents (Stewart & Burgess, 1978). The importance of affiliation as a behavior between parent and child suggests that affiliation

is also significant in the child care setting with affiliation strengthening the attachment relationship between toddler and caregiver and building for infants and toddlers a prosocial atmosphere which supports positive personality formation for the child.

Defining Affiliative Behaviors and Interaction

As a behavior, affiliation is a prosocial activity that includes proximity seeking and contact maintenance between adult and child (Hoch, 1980; Mussen & Eisenberg, 1977). Affiliation studies focus on major positive factors in social interaction, placing emphasis on measurement of those rewards and reinforcements which support positive interaction between parent and toddler. This study measures infant and toddler affiliative behavior using verbal and physical interactions. Toddler affiliation has been assessed by counting frequency of smiling, vocalizing, looking, laughing, showing toys and proximity seeking behaviors by toddlers toward adult. (Lamb, 1977a; 1977b; 1977c; Stewart and Burgess, 1978; and Clarke-Stewart, 1977).

Stewart and Burgess (1978) suggest that parents exhibit more affiliative exchanges than other verbal or physical parental interactions toward their child, that many of these interactions are parent initiated, and that parents display more affiliative behavior than do their children. Categories of smiling and laughing; touching, hugging, and holding; imitative grimaces; high pitched vocalizations; and grooming have been used to measure affiliative behavior on the part of parents when interacting with their toddler (Field, 1978; Stewart and Burgess, 1978; Belsky, 1979). Research on affiliative behavior recognizes

the role of the parent or adult in a reciprocal pattern of interaction involving the infant or toddler with the parent.

Assessment of affiliative behaviors involves multiple variables which include both verbal and physical interactions on the part of the toddler and on the part of the adult. The process of personality development depends on our willingness to acknowledge the multi-dimensional complex nature of the child's social environment (Lamb 1977a). Development for toddlers is influenced by many factors occurring within the family unit and in the larger ecosystem with which the family interacts. An ecosystem perspective to the study of parent-child relationships recognizes that interactions among family members, interactions with relatives, interactions between family and friends, and the child's interactions with others at home or in a day care center all influence the developmental experience for the child and impact on how the parent or caregivers interact with the infant or toddler (Kantor and Lehr, 1975). Patterns of affiliative behavior should not be viewed in isolation, but should be viewed from an ecosystem perspective as behaviors which are influenced in a reciprocal manner by a variety of relationships and experiences for the child and for the adult.

Researchers suggest that differences in affiliative behavior of toddlers, as well as differences in affiliative behavior between toddlers and parents, may be related to play and caregiving activities engaged in by parents with their child, to the gender of parent and of child, and to characteristics of the mothers and fathers (Lamb, 1977b; Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Belsky, 1979; Stewart & Burgess, 1978; Waters, Whippman & Sroufe, 1979; Clarke-Stewart, Umeh, Snow & Pederson, 1980). This suggests that assessment of affiliative behaviors should be made together with other measures such as parental caregiving and

parental play interactions (Diana, 1983). Activities such as caregiving and play provide the adult and child with specific experiences during which affiliative behavior can be expressed both by the adult and the child.

Caregiving as a Measure of Parent-Child Interaction

In most family units, mothers assume primary responsibility for child-rearing during the first several years of the child's development (Creno & Arnoff, 1978; Parke & Sawin, 1976). In families where the mother is not employed outside the home, she spends most of her time with the child involved in feeding and cleaning behaviors to meet the toddler's need for physical care (Belsky, 1979). Research by Kotelchuck (1976) found sixty-four percent of all mothers had full responsibility for daily caregiving tasks with their toddlers. This same study found only twenty-five percent of all fathers regularly involved in caregiving activities with their toddler. However, the research suggests that parent education level influences frequency of caregiving and of parent-toddler interaction. Perrucci, Potter and Rhoades (1978) found that fathers who have a high level of education participate in more shared tasks related to child care than less educated fathers.

The number of experiences parents share with their infant or toddler together with how frequently parents and children display affiliative behavior toward each other, is influenced by the amount of time mothers and fathers have available to participate in activities with their child. Parental time at home relates to the type of activities with their child and to the intensity of parent-child interaction during those times when mother and father are at home (Perrucci, Potter & Rhoades, 1978; Pederson & Robinson, 1969; Kotelchuck, 1976; Vandell, 1979). These findings suggest that for mothers and fathers

who work outside the home, there may be more sharing of child care tasks by both parents. Self-report measures used with mothers and fathers to determine frequency of parental caregiving activities indicate that when both parents work outside the home there is greater involvement on the part of fathers with their toddlers in caregiving activities of all types (Diana, 1983). Caregiving behaviors of general care, feeding and rest show no statistically significant difference between mothers and fathers in an observational study of parents and toddlers. The behavior category of cleaning or hygiene did, however, show a significant difference between parents, with mothers reporting more involvement in cleaning activities with toddlers than was true for fathers (Diana, 1983). While no relationship was found between frequency of parental caregiving activity and frequency of parent-toddler affiliative interaction (Diana, 1983), caregiving suggests an opportune time, both in the home and in the child care programs, for adult and child to engage in activities and responses involving positive affiliative interactions.

Play as a Measure of Parent-Child Interaction

Research on parental play activities indicates that fathers are more involved in play with their toddlers than mothers, particularly when the amount of time fathers have to interact with their child is taken into account (Parke, 1979). Fathers tend to engage in more arousal and exploratory play while mothers engage in more intellectual and social play. Clarke-Stewart

found no difference in the daily play record, the rate of play quality, the frequency of play, or the proportion of child-parent play interactions recorded on the part of toddlers toward their mothers and fathers when play was viewed as a toddler initiated behavior toward their parent.

Differences do exist in typical categories of play interaction for mothers and fathers with their toddlers. Research indicates that fathers engage in more arousal and exploratory play with their child, and that fathers are involved in activities which include fewer containing behaviors than is true for mothers (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Belsky, 1979; and Field, 1979). Studies have also found that toddlers are more cooperative, close, involved, and interested in play with their fathers than in play with their mothers. Play on the part of mothers with their toddlers tends to be more structured, including play with toys which are intellectual or social in nature (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Zegiob, Arnold & Forehand, 1975). Mothers use more positive verbal behaviors, encourage more independent play, and seek an optimal level of child participation during play when compared to fathers (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Weinraub & Frankel, 1977; Zegiob, Arnold & Forehand, 1975). Parke (1979) found that the play of fathers is likely to be physical and arousing rather than intellectual, didactic or mediated by objects as is the case for mothers.

Gender of child also influences parent-toddler play. Both fathers and mothers use more active play behaviors with boys than with girls. As a result, boys demonstrate greater feelings of power with more aggressive, active interactions than do girls. In most situations, fathers and mothers provide less reinforcement for active play by girls and instead reinforce social and intellectual play (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Tauber, 1979; Lamb & Lamb, 1976).

Play between parents and toddlers of the same gender also has unique qualities. Research indicates that parents talk to, sit on the floor with, and share play more with infants and toddlers of the same gender than with infants and toddlers of the opposite gender (Weinraub & Frankel, 1977; Belsky, 1979). These findings suggest that in the home and in the child care programs, differences in adult-child interactions relate to the type of play activities adults do with toddlers as well as to gender of adult and toddler.

In understanding play activities between parent and toddler it is useful to examine the categories of play used to assess style of interaction between parent and child. Social play, intellectual play, arousal play, and exploratory play are among the interaction categories researchers have identified (Belsky, 1979; Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Parke, 1979). These categories of play have usually been used to assess frequency of play interaction between parent and toddler. Whether parent and adult play with toddler takes place in the social, intellectual, arousal or exploratory area each play category involves elements of parental instruction. These play experiences help socialize the child through sharing of objects which increases the amount of partner play experienced by the child (Weinraub & Frankel, 1977; Rheingold, Hay & West, 1976). Adult and toddler play like affiliative interaction between parent and toddler, provides an opportunity for parents and other adults to encourage prosocial behavior on the part of the toddler.

Research indicates that there is a relationship between gender of parent and toddler, affiliative interaction of parent and toddler, and

frequency and type of parent-toddler play interaction (Clarke-Stewart, 1978). Active play on the part of fathers is associated with higher levels of toddler affiliative behavior toward father, particularly when the active play style of fathers is compared with intellectual and social play patterns typical for mothers and toddlers (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Zegiob, 1975). Similar results were found in observational studies of parents and toddlers. In correlation studies of affiliative behavior and play, a statistically significant relationship was found between father's play activities with their toddler and frequency of affiliative behavior with their toddler (Diana, 1983). In particular, positive correlations were found between father's arousal play and father's exploratory play behaviors with their toddler and the frequency of father's affiliative interaction with their toddler. These results suggest that fathers who display more arousal and exploratory play behavior toward their toddlers may also display more affiliative behavior toward their toddlers (Diana, 1983).

Implications for Child Care Programming

Research results from studies on affiliative interaction, caregiving and play suggest several practical applications for child care programs involving infants and toddlers. There is a need to use caregiving and play activities at the same time to increase positive affiliative interaction between caregiver and toddler so the child develops a securely attached relationship to the caregiver. As an initiator of verbal and physical affiliative behavior toward infant and toddler, the caregiver becomes a model of

prosocial behavior for the child. The research on parent toddler interaction has increased our understanding of the dynamic and reciprocal nature of affiliative interaction between caregiver and child, with adult affiliative interaction known to illicit and increase the amount of affiliative interaction on the part of the infant or toddler. Based upon these research results, it is reasonable to conclude that prosocial behaviors by caregivers will help build affiliative interactions by infants and toddlers, thus promoting a more positive group atmosphere.

Findings from research on affiliation suggest that maintenance of low ratios of children to adults, together with the availability of a primary caregiver whom infants and toddlers can trust is important if the child care atmosphere is going to support affiliative interaction and provide children an opportunity for positive personality formation. Scheduling of staff influences the quality of the relationship developing between caregiver and child. The primary caregiver must spend sufficient time with the infants and toddlers so a reciprocal and responsive relationship can develop between the adult and the child. Special attention should be given to scheduling caregivers so they are available for interaction with the infant and toddler during special routine times of feeding, rest, diapering, and toileting in order for the child to build a sense of trust. Whenever possible the primary caregiver should also be the adult who provides comfort and emotional support to the child during times of stress. It is unfortunate when these routine caregiving situations and the critical stress times are handled by aides with whom the infant or toddler has limited contact and develops a superficial relationship. Emphasis on scheduling and in the handling of routines for

infant and toddler care is essential in shaping the roles of the primary caregiver and in making these routines become developmental experiences for the child.

The importance of male interaction in the care of infants and toddlers is clearly evident in the research on parent-child affiliative, caregiving and play interactions. Research showing that fathers and mothers experience similar levels of affiliative interaction with their toddlers suggest that males in child care may be as effective as females in providing the level of nurturance and emotional support needed for the child's successful adjustment to child care. Males in infant and toddler care can provide children of both genders with a role model which helps to make the child care program experience more home-like. The male child care program provider may, like fathers in the home, be more likely to participate in play activities with the child. The play style may be more cooperative, close and involved particularly when the male caregiver is relating to children of the same gender. In play and interaction with infants and toddlers, the male caregiver may bring a unique style promoting more arousal and exploratory play than is characterized by the social and intellectual play style common for mothers and may be common among female caregivers. While the potential of hiring male staff members is limited, it is still possible to provide children in this age range with a male role model by involving fathers and grandfathers as volunteers and special guests. Infants and toddlers will still have exposure to male role models within the realistic constraints of staff availability in the field of early childhood education.

Research relating parental affiliative interactions to categories of social, intellectual, arousal, and exploratory play suggests that in the child care setting a structuring of the infant and toddler play environment may be necessary. We need to provide the child with a rich stimulating environment promoting play in each category. The program would provide social play such as peek and pat-a-cake, dress up and pretend play, and play with dolls and stuffed animals. Intellectual play with puzzles, books, and objects to sort and classify would also be available. Tickle, tumble and roughhouse play, riding and bouncing play, and music and movement would be encouraged to meet the child's needs for arousal play interactions. Exploratory play such as building and stacking, sorting and ordering, and play with mechanical toys would be a part of the child's daily play experience. Careful staff planning of these play experiences may result in infants and toddlers learning skills in areas of play not attempted in other environments. One might anticipate that prosocial behavior on the part of children will increase and the child's adjustment be facilitated when children are exposed to new play activities not experienced in the child's home environment.

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